

**Andover School Committee**  
**Minutes of Thursday, February 25, 2021**  
**Virtual Meeting**

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**Participants from the School Committee:** Chair Shannon Scully, Vice-Chair Susan McCready, Tracey Spruce, Paul Murphy, and Lauren Conoscenti.

**Others participating:** Interim Superintendent Dr. Claudia Bach, Assistant Superintendent Sandra Trach, Assistant Superintendent Sara Stetson, Chief Operations Officer Stephen Nembirkow, Director of Innovation Steve Chinosi, and AHS Student Liaison Jeffrey Connors.

**I. Regular Meeting**

**Call to Order/Moment of Silence**

Chairperson Scully called to order the meeting at 6:00 PM and the Committee immediately voted to meet in Executive Session. The Regular School Committee Meeting will be broadcast by Andover TV and on Comcast Channel 99, Verizon Channel 43 or streamed: [www.andovertv.org](http://www.andovertv.org). *Public Participation via email:* [scremote@andoverma.us](mailto:scremote@andoverma.us)

**II. Executive Session:**

Susan McCready moved to meet in Executive Session pursuant to G.L. chapter 30A, section 21(a), purpose (3) to discuss strategy with respect to bargaining with unionize personnel, namely the Andover Education Association (AEA Unit A because an open session may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Committee. The Committee will reconvene in regular session at approximately 7:00 PM. The motion was seconded by Lauren Conoscenti. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, T. Spruce-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, S. McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

**III. Regular Meeting resumed at 7:02 PM**

**A. Recognitions/Communications**

Dr. Bach had a wonderful meeting with the students of the AHS Student Government Association. They had very intriguing and thoughtful questions about hybrid and remote learning, and participation and achievement.

Sandy Trach provided an update on hybrid remote switch opportunities. The Middle School will happen on March 1<sup>st</sup> and the window will open and an email will be sent to parents. The AHS window will open up on March 17<sup>th</sup> Elementary principals will speak about this later in the meeting.

Susan reported on the Community Forum on the West Elementary/Shawsheen Preschool Building project (WESP). A few weeks ago, they held a community forum that provided details on the schematic design and project estimates. At the Building Committee Meeting on Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, they reviewed the budget and approved the submission of the schematic design and budget numbers to MSBA. MSBA re-evaluated our reimbursement rate and it went up about 1%, a little more than \$1.2M more that we are eligible for reimbursement. The anticipated cost of the project is \$151,661,978, and with the anticipated grant from MSBA of \$38.5M, the cost to the District will be about \$113.2M. The School Building Facilities reports can be found on the APS website. The Community is encouraged to participate in the meetings.

Susan also thanked Rita Casper and Sara Stetson for inviting her to participate in a meeting held yesterday with physicians from Andover Pediatrics, who wrote a letter to the Editor of the Andover Townsman asking for students to be returned to school as soon as possible. The physicians shared what they are seeing within their practice and their concerns around mental health. The discussion included the difficulties of the logistics of meeting DESE Guidelines. Sara said it was a wonderful opportunity and she was happy to share and educate attendees on some of things we are doing they may not be aware of.

Paul Murphy said the next SEPAC meeting is on Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. Registration is available online or on their Facebook page. A big shout out to all the kids and adults involved in arts and athletics who are 'making things happen'.

Lauren Conoscenti reported on the SC Informal Forum that she and Paul hosted on Feb 9<sup>th</sup> with about 50 people participating via zoom. They received great feedback and the questions all focused on the issue of getting kids back to school full time and health and safety issues. Saturday, March 20<sup>th</sup> is next forum.

Tracey Spruce announced that tonight is opening night for the AHS Theatre Guild Production of "Almost, Maine" which will consist of four live streamed shows. Andover theatre tickets are available at [Andovertheatre.com](http://Andovertheatre.com) on APS webpage. The students and Susan Choquette have worked hard on this production.

AHS Liaison Jeffrey Connors said the student government was unable to attend a survey group for hiring the superintendent, but they did come up with some qualities they would like them to have: respect for student voices, to uphold the APS core values of inclusivity and equality and a Superintendent who would hold a once a month opportunity to engage with students. In addition, they would like to acknowledge the productive conversation they had with Dr. Bach, there was great dialogue on both ends.

As liaison to Retirement Board from the School Committee, Shannon Scully reported that the Board met this morning and discussed important topics related to pension reforms. They will meet on April 1<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 PM to discuss potential changes to eligibility and will meet on April 29<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 PM to talk about Buyback.

## **B. Public Input: General Topics**

Elizabeth Wright, 31 Town Farm Road, Ipswich, MA is a Middle School Math Teacher at DMS. She thanked Susan and Tracey for speaking to the Executive Board of the AEA as School Committee candidates regarding Policy JBB Educational Equity. The Educational Equity Policy is noble in its goals; , the student's identity will no longer predict how that student fairs in the district. She gives credit that there appears to be an acknowledgement by way of some broad action the district will take, but a policy on paper is not the same as actions towards that goal. She commends the Committee's commitment to anti-racism.

She is here to ask that the Committee take a specific action, to call for the suspension of MCAS testing this year. MCAS is an outdated and punitive test that has its roots in racism and creates a seemingly objective measure that reinforces the dominant culture. It is her view, that the School Committee should grant the children of APS the same exemption given

to private schools. Twenty-eight communities in MA have already passed a resolution. This action will benefit all students.

Matt Bach, 163 Glenwood St, Malden, AHS teacher and President of the AEA.

If the SC is prepared to make a strong statement and act by sending a statement for an exemption on MCAS to the DESE Commissioner, the Secretary of Education, and the Governor, the AEA is ready to review and collaborate and sign onto it as well. On behalf of the educators of students in Kindergarten and First Grade, the AEA is very eager to have their students back in-person. They understand the value of in-person instruction above any other type of relationships teachers have with students.

Kerry Costello, Immediate Past President of the AEA. The educators in the elementary schools need to be vaccinated and urged all the adults in this meeting to reach out to the Governor and to our local representatives requesting that teachers be vaccinated for their personal safety. Also, there are questions surrounding the SC Policy with remote students, who in order to be marked present have to be actively engaged in learning. There seems to be some confusion about what that means at the upper levels. She does not know if there are any parameters or rubrics that could be shared.

### **C. Response to Public Input**

Shannon appreciates Kerry's points about vaccinations, the SC did send a letter to the Governor and Commissioner of Education requesting assistance with a number of things including vaccinations for teachers. Secretary Peyser replied with a letter on why educators are listed where they are on the vaccination phase.

### **D. Education**

#### **a. General Updates including Health and Safety**

Rita Casper provided an update on the results of the survey sent to parents on pool testing options 15% of families responded with 50% of those respondent's in favor of testing. Employees: 20% responded and 70% would be interested in testing. Given the response numbers which are lower than expected, we have decided at this point, to not participate in the State's Program of Pool Testing; however, we will continue to research other options that are worth pursuing.

#### **b. Modified in-person learning plan for K/1 students by School Principals**

The draft plan for Grades K/1 students in the hybrid model to return to school in-person, four days per week (Mon, Tues, Thurs and Friday) with a target start date of March 8<sup>th</sup> was discussed by the Elementary Principals through a slide presentation. The Elementary Principals (Michelle Costa, Jennifer Hunt, Brenda Lee, Jason DiCarlo, and Pam Lathrop) have met together and with the Central Office Team as well as with their Assistant Principals, staff and teachers working countless hours to arrive at this plan. This has been a thoughtful and planful effort to return students to in-person learning.

Young students need to learn social-emotional skills to navigate school and interact with their peers, they have a more difficult time with remote instruction, they need key fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, and more direct instruction in early reading skills. They need opportunities for movement and interacting. All of the foundation skills happen in the younger grades.

Their goal is to have more in-person learning for students in grades K and 1. Remote academy families can request a shift to in-person (K and 1) from March 8-March 15 with a start date to be determined. They will be looking at their space and enrollment numbers to see where they can grant these requests. All students will maintain at-home learning day on Wednesdays.

A review of what the school day will look like included information on transportation, arrival and dismissal, school spaces, instruction, snack/lunch/recess, specialists and staffing. The classrooms will look similar to what they are in the hybrid model, they will however, have to shift to a 3' distance to allow the other children to come back, and may need additional spaces for eating. Instruction will follow a blended approach and children will still be taking home their iPad. Student will have to maintain a distance of 6' apart for eating. They will keep the same specialist model and schedule.

What families can do to make the transition smoother:

- Fill out the District survey that will be going out on Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup> and return
- Consider shifting to bus transportation to reduce the number of cars on school property.
- Continue to offer extra reminders regarding masks, distancing and hand-washing/sanitizer.
- Acknowledge ranges of emotion that might occur, anxiety, frustration, resistance confusion and false starts.

All members of the School Committee recognized the administrators/educators for their creativity and the tremendous amount of work they have done in making this first-step happen. It appears that we are more embracing of the 3' rule, and that is not where we were in August; we have a lot more data now than we did before. It is clear that our youngest students have a high need to be together and this is a good first step, but not the only step. They know to keep their masks on and how to distance.

Claudia said we have a long list of supply needs and the need for more substitutes which are all being covered through the Covid Relief and ESSER Funding. Steve Nembirkow reported that there is enough room in the budget now to cover building based substitutes, and ESSER2 funding can be spent on anything that helps brings kids back to school.

The School Committee, Dr. Bach, and the principals had a lengthy discussion on bringing back students to in-school learning.

Parent Comments: Several parents commented on the return to school for K-1 students. They are supportive of the plan to return K-1 to in-person learning, and recognize the tireless efforts that have occurred over the last year. They are encouraged that DESE is open to 3' distancing, and that Andover is utilizing a survey to get an idea of the numbers. There are concerns with the troubling data about kids being behind academically and socially; the littlest learners have been affected by the impacts of not being in-school. Let the community help you solve the problems with getting students back to class.

There were about a dozen comments submitted via SC Remote which Susan McCready summarized for the Committee.

Susan McCready moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve the Modified In-person Learning Plan for K and Grade 1 students in the Hybrid Model to return to school in person four days/week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday) as presented. The motion was seconded by Paul Murphy. Roll call: T. Spruce-Y, P. Murphy-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, S. McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

**E. Continuing Business**

**1. FY21 budget: short term FTE repurposing**

Steve Nembirkow said our FY-21 budget surplus continues to grow as we have been unable to fill positions due to childcare issues, health concerns, etc. They are proposing a plan to take 4 IA positions and temporarily repurpose them to increase the existing guidance position by .4 at AHS and to increase two elementary math coach positions by .5 each for the remainder of this school year in order to meet immediate needs of the District. This re-purposing will allow us to address some of the learning gaps in math and some of the social emotional problems. These changes do not add staff or benefit packages.

The Administration's recommendation to add the same 0.4 FTE for guidance and 1.0 FTE for math coaches in the FY-22 budget will be a separate discussion, the outcome of which is not dependent on this temporary FY21 FTE repurposing proposal.

Susan McCready moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve the Superintendent's recommendation for FY-21 FTE repurposing as presented. Motion seconded by Paul Murphy. Roll call: L. Conoscenti-Y, T. Spruce-Y, S. McCready-Y, P. Murphy-Y, and S. Scully-Y. Motion passes: 5-0.

**2. FY22 Budget Update**

Stephen Nembirkow provided a brief update on FY-22 budget planning, including a summary of information gathered with administrative leaders over the past months to refine FY-22 budget priorities fitting within a 3.75% increase. The budget books have been printed and disseminated. An in-depth discussion on the FY-22 budget will be held on Thursday, March 4<sup>th</sup>. The Budget is a level service budget and provides flexibility as we go forward and it meets all contractual obligations.

The budget is a level-service budget with contingencies for some Covid protocols, and does not account for or rely upon State and/or Federal Covid Relief Funds, and provides the ability to add additional resources within the 3.75% Preliminary Budget.

Personnel	\$	75,239,845	
General Expenses	\$	<u>17,353,607</u>	
Total budget number of	\$	92,593,452	increase of 3.75%
TM Recommendation	\$	92,593,452	

Chapter 70 Aid: Despite a loss in students we were held harmless and our aid increased a little bit

Foundation Enrollment: October 1 enrollment shows a decline this year which we hope to recapture that loss going forward. The loss is mostly due to other school alternatives parents sought this past year.

Budget Increase History: 3.75% for FY-22  
10 Year average 3.88%  
5 -Year average 4.0%

Circuit Breaker Funding: \$1.7M for FY-21 and \$2.5M for FY-22

We are increasing our reserve as we go forward, our reimbursements have been going up meaning we have been servicing more kids.

Full Day Kindergarten Revolving Account: We have been dipping into this revenue fund as we slowly move our K personnel and expenses to the operating budget as a result of Full Day Tuition Free Kindergarten that began this school year. The fund should come to an end in 2023-2024.

Budget Drivers: Contract negotiations, step/track changes, legal costs, utilities, custodial services, athletics and full-day Kindergarten.

Staffing FTE: The FTE count increased from last year but noted that 5.7 of the 8+ FTE change is a result of IA's moving from the kindergarten revolving to the general funding account, 1.5 teachers moving from kindergarten revolving to general fund, and 2 FTE's added for school nursing (1) and custodial supervisor (1).

#### **F. Consent Agenda**

1. Grants/Donations to District: 4 grants: Two for Sanborn/Two for AHS
2. School Committee Minutes of January 7, January 21, January 28, 2021.

Tracey Spruce moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Lauren Conoscenti.

Roll call: S. McCready-Y, P. Murphy-Y, T. Spruce-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y Shannon Y.  
Motion passes 5-0.

#### **G. Adjournment**

At 9:54 P.M. Paul Murphy moved to adjourn the meeting of Thursday, February 25, 2021. The motion was seconded by Tracey Spruce. Roll call: L. Conoscenti-Y, P. Murphy-Y, T. Spruce-Y, S. McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes: 5-0

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo  
Recording Secretary.